



# Armenian Genocide Denial

Renée Rippberger and Elizabeth Stencel



Advisor: Joachim Savelsberg, Department of Sociology, University of Minnesota

## INTRODUCTION

Turkey, formerly known as the Ottoman Empire denies that its former government committed genocide against Armenians, an ethnic and religious minority, in the context of World War One from 1915-1917. In our research, we explore denial of the Armenian genocide by the Turkish state and other actors.

## AN EXAMINATION OF GENOCIDE AND DENIALISM

Raphael Lemkin coined the term “genocide” in 1944. He was inspired to create the term after he learned of the ethnic cleansing of the Armenians. “Geno-” (Greek word) meaning race or tribe “cide” (Latin word) killing  
Legal Definition: Genocide is defined in Article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part1 ; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [and] forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."



Photographer: Antoine Agoudjian- held an exhibit in Le Doubs, à Valentigney in France was met with opposition from some Turkish people



Photo taken from Le Collectif VAN's website showing Armenian victims of deportations.

|                                |   |  |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Analytic Dimensions            | Armenia and the International Community   | Turkey   |
| Name of What Occurred in 1915: | Genocide  | Massacre   |
| Cause of Conflict:             | Ethnic and religious hatred of Armenians was propagated by the Young Turks. The Armenians had been victims of pogroms in 1894 and also 1896. The violence eventually culminated into a genocide after a fervor of Pan-Turkism nationalism swept the nation. | Armenians were a security threat to the Ottoman Empire because of their allegiance to Russia. Their questionable allegiance was cause for forced relocation. Armenians had also conducted massacres of innocent Turkish civilians. Turkey was forced to defend themselves against the Armenians. |
| Number of Victims:             | 1 million to 1.5 million dead   | 300,000 to 500,000 dead  |
| Cause of Death:                | The victims were killed systematically and with intent in an ethnically and religiously motivated cleansing by the Ottoman Empire.  | The thousands dead are due to unfortunate and unintentional massacres. During relocation Kurdish rebels attacked their camps killed Armenian citizens and due to a mighty drought many Armenians unfortunately perished.   |

## METHODS

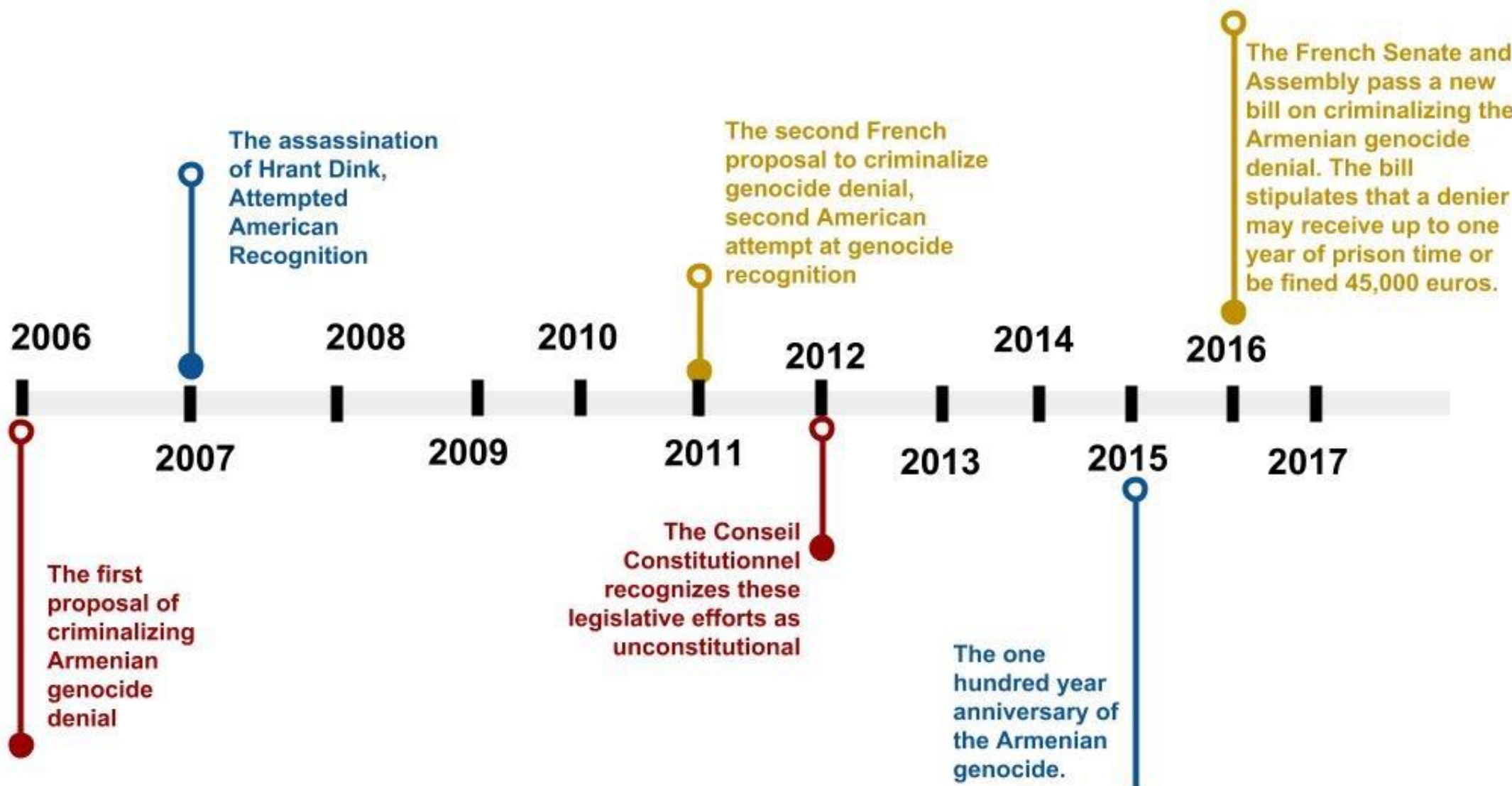
We utilize Le Collectif VAN (Vigilance Arménienne Contre le Negationnisme) a French-Armenian organization dedicated to cataloguing every instance of Armenian genocide denial since 2006. Two months into the project, we have so far coded over 300 instances of genocide denial. By systematically examining the denialists, the form and the medium of denial, we hope to advance the knowledge on patterns of denialism of mass atrocities for this specific case.

### Coding categories for VAN register of denialism

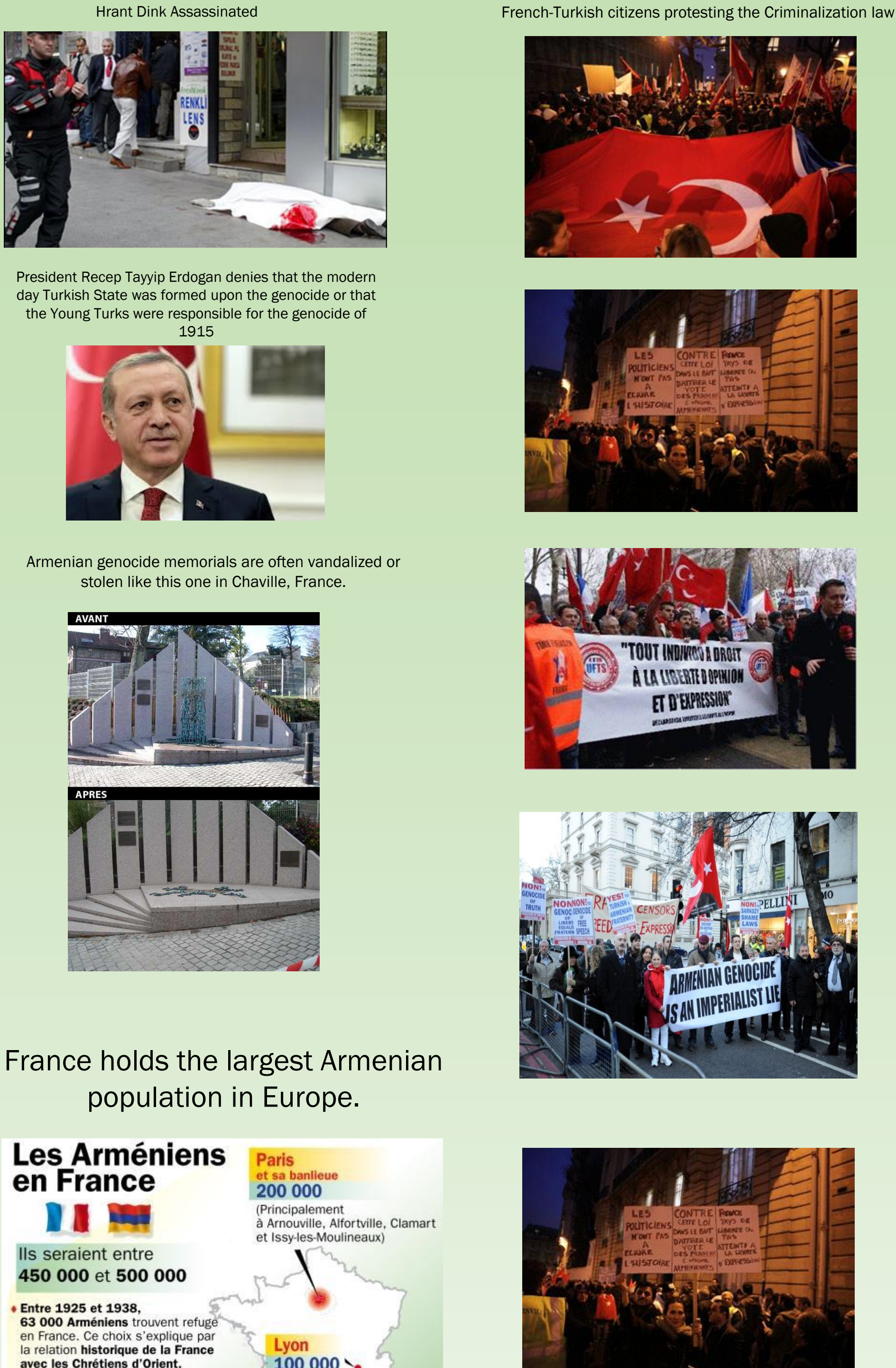
- Date of VAN entry
- Does VAN cite a source of information (which source)?
- Who denies (specific actors, individuals, organizations, ethnic/national groups)?
- Who, if anyone, is cited as sponsor of the denialist action?
- What is being denied?
  - The number of dead
  - The applicability of the genocide label
  - The (sole) responsibility of the Ottoman Empire (e.g., Armenian armed resistance)
  - Other
- What form does denial take?
  - Celebration of perpetrator
  - Challenge of recognition law
  - Other (gather)
- What medium does the denialist action use?
  - Media, and if so
    - Article
    - Opinion piece
    - Advertisement
    - Other
  - Demonstration
  - Government declaration
  - Law suit

- Where does the denialist action take place (country, town)?
- Is opposition being cited? If so, who?
- Source

## LEGISLATIVE TIMELINE



## Against Armenian Genocide Recognition



## ANALOGICAL BRIDGING

“Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?”  
-Adolf Hitler

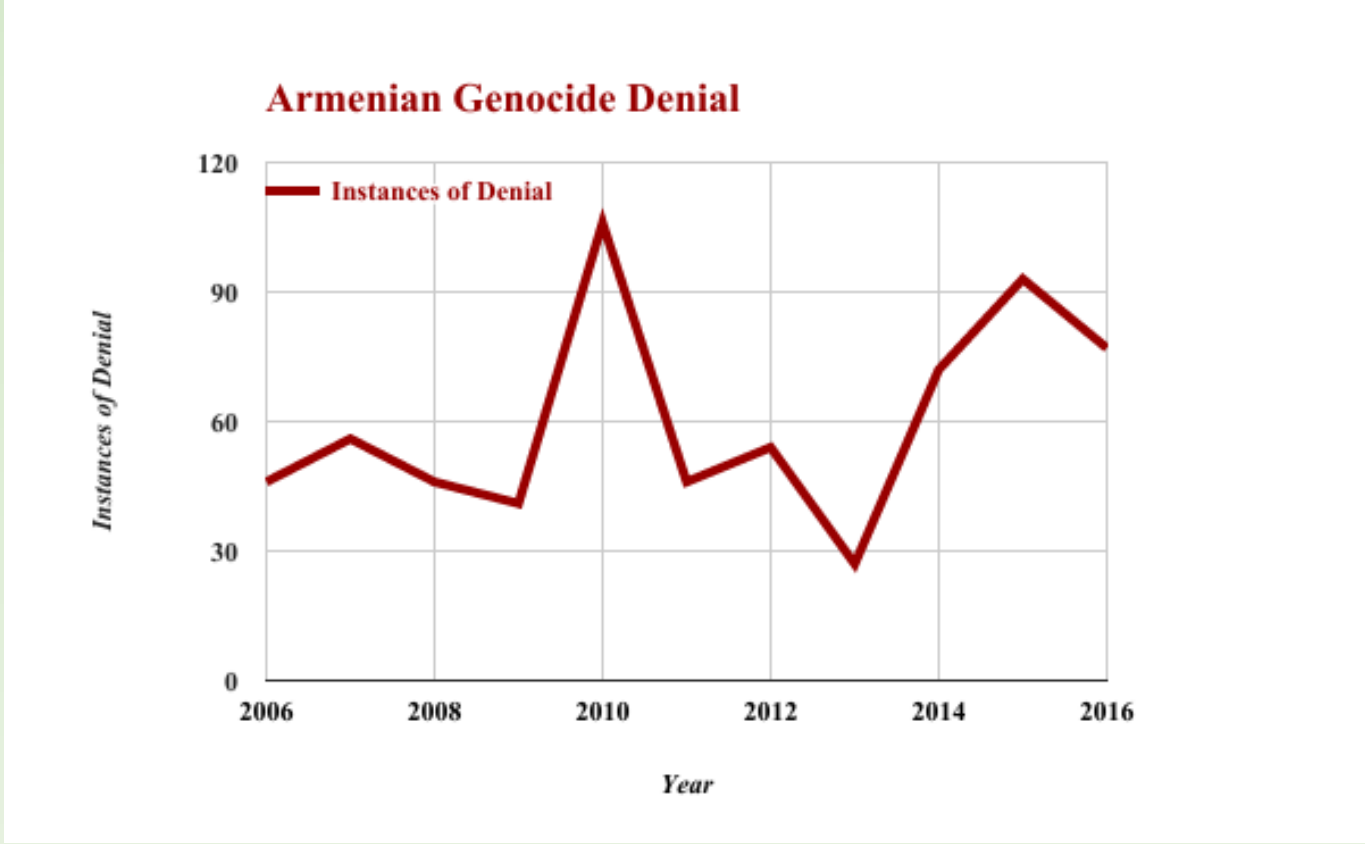
“The supporters of the latter (The Young Turks), by the way, openly admit that the final goal of their actions against the Armenians is their total annihilation in Turkey.” 2 This is an excerpt taken from a telegraph from July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1915 between two German government officials.

The total annihilation of Armenians in Eastern Anatolia was the first genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many scholars agree that the genocide of the Armenians served as an example to Hitler in his quest to obliterate Europe’s Jewish population.

Naming a genocide just that might seem like a trivial matter, but the name “genocide” holds power. While the Armenian genocide occurred over 100 years ago, we can look to more recent cases like Rwanda where politics of naming had dire consequences. Former President Bill Clinton’s greatest shame was not naming the Rwandan conflict a genocide sooner. The United States therefore had no obligation to stop or hinder the killings of over 1 million people.

## KEY FINDINGS

- We find that modern day Turkey, while a separate being from the Ottoman Empire, the perpetrator of the genocide, still propagates this denialism. Turkey’s state sanctioned denial is a veritable industry which actively lobbies the international community against recognition of the Armenian genocide. While over 20 nation states have formally recognized the Armenian genocide, countries that attempt to recognize the genocide are met with hostility from Turkey in the form of diplomatic sanctions, the cancellation of economic trade, and counter accusations of genocide.
- In this ideological battle, Turkey arms itself with facts favorable to its version of events. Turkey often employs counter accusations of ethnically motivated killings against Armenians. While Armenians were aligned with Russia, an enemy of the Ottoman Empire at the time, no credible historians have been able to document systematic and large scale, intentional killings perpetrated by the Armenians.
- Those who recognize the events of 1915 are often persecuted by fringe Turkish ultranationalist groups. Several prominent advocates for genocide recognition have received death threats or even been assassinated. Turkish nationals who recognize the genocide may be punished under Turkish Penal Code 301, which criminalizes the “denigration of the Turkish nation”.



## CONCLUSIONS

This research project is a work in progress and there are still some years that we have yet to code thoroughly. Although we are not finished, we have found through our studies of instances of denial of the Armenian genocide the importance of the continuation of research into these instances of denial. Social science researchers should continue looking into these denials and work towards a day where no one will deny the horrific genocide that ended so many lives.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Although so far our work has provided substantial insights, the data we have coded will eventually be used to do quantitative analysis of Armenian genocide denial.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND REFERENCES

- Acknowledgement: CLA Freshman Research and Creative Scholars Award
1. Anon. n.d. “CollectifVAN.org.” CollectifVAN.org. Retrieved April 9, 2017 (<http://www.collectifvan.org/>).
  2. Gust, Wolfgang. 2014. The Armenian genocide: Evidence from the German Foreign Office Archives, 1915-1916. New York: Berghahn Books.
  3. Anon. n.d. “What is Genocide?” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Retrieved April 9, 2017 (<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007043>).
  4. Anon. n.d. “What is Genocide?” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Retrieved April 9, 2017 (<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007043>).